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Canadian Poetry Magazine

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Contributions are needed and would be very welcome.

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POETS ARE BORN NOT MADE

"EVERYONE knows what poetry is; yet few people would attempt to define it. It reminds us of the quaint old Roman saying, "I know it if you don't ask me." It is easier to say what poetry is not. A piece of writing is not poetry just because it rhymes. Nor is it poetry just because it doesn't rhyme. Nor again does a thing become poetical because it makes no sense as prose and is quite unintelligible to ordinary common sense. Nor will any amount of disturbance of the ordinary rules of grammar, the freedom called "poetic license", in and of itself make poetry, any more than a liquor license can make liquor. In other words both the old idea of rhymed verse turned out to measure and the new idea of free verse turned out to grass are equally erroneous."

—Excerpt from Chapter IX,
HOW TO WRITE
by Stephen Leacock.
(Dodd, Mead & Co.)

FALLEN TIMBER

These are the riches a forest will hold
and guard with strong green fingers
like mounds of gold sun-drifted:
the recumbent old, like venerable men
with reaching and yearning cold in their veins,
with the journey of stars, the pulse of shifting seasons
no longer nudging their roots.

Their shaggy bark like wrinkled old skin around them
in a reasonable peace,
they surrender to the destiny curled in their seed,
fulfillment their glory
and reverence for an earth eternally warm.

This is the final punctuation in an aged sentence
once a declaration of strength
that might have helped a voice span continents,
or ridden flame in an offer of heat,
that might have formed a shell to hold back the weather
or divided one kingdom from another;
now short phrases of wisdom to nourish young roots.
And nature, on low syllables of wind,
bends her soft inflection,
giving in the silence of falling snow
a cover, a blessing.

These are the riches a forest will hold:
for every ending a greater beginning
from the love of the recumbent old.

Bernice Ames

SPINSTER AND GASFIRE

This little nook, an islet off the frozen
Vast continent of dark, enchanted burns
As if the sorceries of June had chosen
To concentrate in one resplendent rose
Whatever warmth that iron arctic spurns —
And that's my gas-fire, whose asbestos anthers
Hum with the soft bombardments of her bees.
And why not, heart, until the illusion goes,
Warm your old innocence as well as knees
And fingers? Why not this voluptuous muse
In fur-warmths fathoms deep, like cat's or panther's?
For just a stride away, whatever touch
Alights on — pen or daily bread or news —
Now feels that icy continental clutch
And sears the sense until the vitals freeze.

Geoffrey Johnson

EPIGRAM ON A BOY DYING YOUNG

And so may his ashes be violets and roses,
and the children forget not his mirth,
or the laughter of him who quiet reposes,
and now is the child of grave earth.
when the faraway hills meet the ray
of the sun rising sudden and swift without warning,
For he played, and the curls of his head were like morning,
And he died like a summer's day.

J. A. S. Evans

THE RIDING STABLE IN WINTER

Here in the dim and the almost dark and the warmth of the truth
In this winter stable the Teacher says a few words and supernatural horses
Carry children. The little boys and girls high on their splendid natural horses
Like birds on a tree or stars in God's thought hold themselves in the powerful place
And poise themselves with pride and grace. They circle. The horses walk.
They trot, The children like fish in the dim and gorgeous sea in winter or summer
Go up and down or lovers in the vague but calling bed of the universe.
The Teacher says a few words and the great horses ride like Kings.
I cannot remember the names of the gifts or the horses or the stars or Beauty
But in the winter the children like the calm and the radiant made me remember these words.

John Tagliabue

I AM A STAR

I am a star in the firmament
On the world reflecting, the world rejecting,
By its own fire consumed and spent.

I am the sea that nightly rages,
So clamorous-wild, with victims piled,
My toll still mounting through the ages.

An exile from your world, and banned,
In pride upgrown, by pride o'erthrown,
I am the king without a land.

I am passion lashing in the void,
Without home on shore, without sword in war,
By my own strength I am destroyed.

From the German of Hermann Hesse,
by K. W. Maurer

METAMORPHOSIS?

Did I once fly
in feathers
run in fur
coil on a warm stone
'neath an April tree?

Is this why April
suns awake
wild thought
of claw, fangs,
flight, in me?

H. Patricia Collacott

BURIAL AT SEA

Four men with sea-blank eyes carried the coffin
Down the slope to the uneasy boat.
The widow and her daughters blackened the grey wall
While gulls unravelled their strings of sound
In an arched sky.
The morning was stretched with autumn sunshine.

A flight of flash-bulbs,
And yesterday afternoon's pleasure boat
Slowly peeled the skin off the sea
And nosed its way to the core of death's ripe fruit.
The box — the container for the thing contained —
Might have been a chest enclosing some old treasure
Of the sea.

He had seen only
The wet teeth of the waves bared for fighting
When with his feet wide apart
As though standing on the deck
He died on the hospital bed.

But not everyone has lived at sea
For thirty-five years. Some may have
Far stranger realities, stark in the bed,
To take with them.

Maurice Tasnier

THE SUMMIT

Sudden wakening — and once again the resounding surprise
of self.
I — swift, flooding;
The black hills slung against the sky and the horizon spinning;
The incredulous air shivering, touching the trees for comfort.
The brain is immense now,
Shouldering white light.
The infinitesimal chance of its own being
Rears it upon an agony of triumph,
Awareness crashes the walls of inertia,
Light screams in an ecstasy of expansion,
The explosion is splendour,
Death out-brillianced.

Elfreida Read

THE BOND

There is that tallness in the trees this afternoon;
They are so grandly assured, with their greenness upon them.
They rebuff the heady wind.
With deliberate composure their roots take a firmer hold of
the earth.
And the child, running beneath the trees, across the springing
grass,
Wind-lifted, laughter-driven,
With pansies in her nut-brown hair,
Is my child.

And all at once the tallness of trees is within me,
And their greenness,
And the deep satisfaction of roots.

Elfreida Read

THE DEAD TREE

The dead tree by the fence
shall never again
feel the birth-pangs
of buds bursting bark.

The timber,
drained of all sap,
too hard for the crude carving
of the initials of lovers.

It is so split by death
it can no longer hold
the hinges on which swung
the welcoming gate.

Come in now
and sit by the fire.
Tomorrow
we shall feel the dead wood.

Ian Mudie

FOR THERE WE LOVED

Stark boughs draw charcoal lines
On pewter skies —
The lake a gem of quartz;
A meager moon
Lights snow on fir-tipped hills.
Through aching eyes
I see flamingos
On a blue lagoon . . .

Maude Rubin

WALK IN WIND

To walk so completely in this wind
as to be naked to it
that is what this October day asks of me,
to completely forget that cities have soared and crumbled
in the old deserts
forget that other cities blaze with lights
forget the forever murmur of shoes on their pavements.
To be the first man in the wind
that is what this day asks
and this wind that tastes of saffron,
that twangs around me like a dozen cellos.

This wind has swept the cold cliffs like a broom
has pulled pine needles loose
and sent them arrowing into the dark pools,
it has ruffed the stiff fur of the little russet foxes
and stunned the snake with threat of frost.

To walk completely in this October day
is to be wind conquered
and not quite wholly human.
Listen, the long wind
it is surf beating always
on the coasts of time.

Alan Donovan

SHE WAS BORN IN THE HOLLOW

Her eyes turn to hilltops
But she was born in the hollow
Where the fox and ground-hog
Scurry and burrow.
Her heart listens to the highlands
But she was raised in the hollow
Fretting at the rain doves'
Cry of sorrow.
Her mind calls to mountains
But she wed in the hollow —
Home is a hewn cabin
Crowded by a willow.
Her soul longs to climb
But she is held in the hollow
Where feet find paths
Pinched in, narrow.
She leans toward the slopes
That are turning twisted yellow,
Dreamed horizons fade —
She will die in the hollow.

Laura M. Shaulis

THE SOUND REMAINS

Even your voice on some far ether wave
Still vibrates —
The sound remains.
Gardenias wear the fairness of your face;
Your songs play air and water
Space and star,
Grace of pliant willow,
Fragrance of syringa . . .
No part of loveliness is ever lost.

Maude Rubin

PORTRAIT PAINTER

I planned to succeed as Rembrandt the Second,
Portraying old people like gnarled winter vines
With foliage withered, but on weathered faces
Suggestions of harvests of life's vintage wines.
I studied and travelled; I chose well my models
With tendrils of wrinkles from dreams lost or found,
Endeavored to capture the past on such features
For which the Old Master himself was renowned.

They posed and I painted and each left behind him
His image on canvas; but seldom his dream
Was impaled on my brush, imprisoned in pigment,
Defying my skill and defeating my scheme.
The harvests were garnered, the visions had flown;
The vineyard I trespassed was Rembrandt's alone.

Margaret Fulton Frame

SOME LINES ON DESPAIR

Cries of the mad and the birds,
And the breaking of buds in the sky,
Oh, who in all of heathendom,
Is half so sad as I?

Time of the breaking of minds and of ice,
Of running sap and sugar snow,
Oh, keep the lovers in search of grass,
From all they do not know!

The young think it matters but now,
Save for the sake of the child,
I would reel to a daffodil drowning,
Out on some flooded wild.

Joan Finnigan

THE KEEPER

How often have I loved you,
In what cities of my soul
Have you lived, precious one?
In what worlds of apparition,
In which consciousness are you,
Oh, dearest earthbound sun?
Have we met, have we lived,
Before this holy hour?
Have not these virgin candles
Burned before?
And this heart that is giv'n,
Was it ever really mine?
Or have I been the keeper of the door?

Judith Eckerson

BUT SUMMER WANES

My thoughts, beloved, are a merry throng
    Of new-uncurling leaves that stem in you,
    Whose crested eaglets ride the sunlit blue,
And whose June-honeyed roots are deep and strong.
To your sweet offices my days belong;
    Your health is mine, and mine your native hue.
    At dawn, or noon, or at the fall of dew,
Your heart-beat is the measure of my song.

But summer wanes. The ripened wheat is stirred;
    It sighs and trembles as the reaper nears,
With downcast eyes and cold, impartial word,
    He whets his sickle and the harvest hears;
And joy is heavy as a wounded bird
    Upon whose breast the widening stain appears.

Kathryn Munro

LATE BLOSSOMING

The blackberry brier at my back door, having put forth nothing
    but thorns
For a season or two,
Has shaken to the October wind a handful of creamy flowers;

And I, leaning against the door-frame,
Yawning and heavy-lidded, deeply content,
Know in my core what life it is stirs in that woody stem.

Nacella Young

THE SCRUBWOMAN

This silent drudge
  Rinses and wrings,
As if she were washing
  Other things.

Not merely floors
  She tackles on knees,
But inner burdens
  She must appease.

Heavy, she labors
  As if in relief
Of trying to mop up
  Smudges of grief;

As if she were cleansing,
  With soap and water
The stain of one
  Who seemed her daughter.

Louis Ginsberg

DRUMS OF GHANA

Each pulsing wave,
each whispering breeze
that sighs at dawn and dark —
implicit in the throb of sound —
each stroke a flying spark.

A spark that lights
and fills the mind
with rhythms of its own,
visions that flame
and warm the soul
responsive to their tone.

Yet tropic night
and drums that sing,
as echoes rise and fall,
can never dim
the heart's soft beat
for home and true love's call.

Don W. Thomson

BRIEF MEETING

Not half an hour: minutes cannot measure
The heart's time that transforms from bud to flower,
That sets the semblance of half an hour
Between no-treasure and treasure.

A star breaks from the king-sun's white:
Millions of light-years are born to shine,
And the minute extends with them, a design
Changing the cheek of the night:

They were not there before, the stars that I
Hold in my mind and my mind altered forever
By the minute's gesture that flows as an endless river
Of time's eternity.

J. Phoenice

FIRST FROST

When night hung heavy over the village
And a pallid moon malevolently
Watched the distant earth,
This cold-blooded sadist, sire of Winter,
Walked through the garden.
The grass shrank from his icy feet,

Palely he gazed at the blossoms
Flaunting their fragrant beauty.
He inclined his white lips
Towards the golden flowers
And with a dreadful delicacy
Breathed out his sigh of death.

. . . . . .

In the sallow light of morning
The tarnished flowers stand stark:
The gold of summer has been spent.

Dorothy Wells

BEACH TABLEAU

White is the sand
Emerald the sea,
Shadow runs on the sea
Like colour
Shedding violet and blue.

Sun runs on the sea,
Like colour, like colour,
Turns the sea green.
Yet not for long,
For shadow runs seaward,
Racing like colour;
Changing mirror at play.

Foam runs on the sea,
Foam flaring like fire!
Foam raging in torment,
Spending, distending, out-reaching and ending
And dying in hems
Of silver on sand.

Wave conquers the beach
Then dies in the reach;
But only can colour
Change the face of the strand.

Water runs on the sand
Like colour,
And colour
Glides over the sand
Like water, like water.

Ah! Let me confuse them —
Colour and water,
Water and colour,
Take this for that!

Let me play on the strand,
With colour and sand,
With water and shell.

Leave me only my eyes!
Let my eyes, let my eyes
Race over the world
Like colour, like colour,
Like colour on sea!

Leo Cox —
from the French of Anne Hébert

CHILD IN A CARPENTER SHOP

Learning the tools
Of his father's trade,
He nailed one lath across another,
Then silently brought it to his mother.
With trembling sense
Of future loss,
She saw the sign
The child had made.
It was a cross.

D. B. Steinman

TIME, THE OLD ENEMY . . .

See Time, the old enemy,
Scything the mellowing
Years in the meadow all
Yielding and yellowing . . .

Frosting his ruinous
Pollen on petal
And dusting the stamen with
Death, see him settle . . .

So comes the old enemy,
Stealthy, whenever
We're heart-close at parting
In our deep fever . . .

Then, shamed by such benison,
Lifting, uptending,
Expands our last moments in
Omen unending . . .

Leo Cox

THE SEARCH

Who wishes still to seek
in depths of the silent skies?
Or in youth, far from the shadows
which stretch with the air of a dream
in the gleaming flowers?

We see him with his broken skull
lying before a flower,
he who failed in his search.
In what sad paths did he walk,
his heart closed like roses at night?

How far did he go, in his disturbance,
and why did he linger
in the fresh evening light? In his death
only the dew touches now, gently, his hand,
and only the rose makes silence for him.

Landreth E. Leaper

REVIEWS OF NEW VERSE

The Testament of Cresseid, tr. Fred Cogswell, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 24 pp., $1.00.

One of the most unfairly neglected fields of our literature is the Middle Scots poetry of the century following the death of Chaucer in the South. Morsels of Henryson and Dunbar have found their way into the *Oxford Book of English Verse* but generally speaking their work is little known, even to many scholars.

The general reader will be grateful therefore to Professor Fred Cogswell, an Edinburgh Ph.D. on the staff of the University of New Brunswick, for his Modern English verse rendering of Robert Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid.* In this worthy pendant to Chaucer's great *Troilus and Criseyde,* the greatest of the Scots "makars" tells how the heroine, cast off by a glutted Diomedes, accuses Cupid and Venus as the authors of her misfortune, is punished with leprosy, mourns her fate, and at the end is given honorable sepulture by Troilus, the knight whom she had once deserted. Except for the seven nine-line stanzas of her lament, the poem (616 lines long) is written in the same rhyme-royal that Chaucer had used for his *Troilus.*

Dr. Cogswell has used a masterly hand to render this into the same stanza-patterns in his modern version. Sometimes, however, the exigencies of rhyme and metre frustrate his best efforts. Thus the matchless epitaph of stanza 85.

> "Lo, fair Lady is, Crisseid, of Troyis Toun,
> Sumtyme countit the flour of Womanheid,
> Under this stane lait Lipper lyis deid"

is transposed and padded out as

> "Beneath this stone — fair ladies all behold —
> Fair Cresseid, once the flower of womanhead,
> A low and loathsome Leper lieth dead."

On the other hand, he sometimes skilfully uses assonance to replace an irrecoverable alliteration. Thus, where Cresseid says that her leprous voice

> "Is rawk as Ruik, full hiddeous hoir and hace",

the modern rendering says that it

> "Is like a Crow's to caw in raucous bass."

On the whole, it is a valuable undertaking, worthily performed.

W. K.

$12,100 AWARDED TO CANADIAN WRITERS

Four fellowships with a total value of $12,100 have been awarded to young Canadian creative writers by the Canada Foundation, it is announced in Ottawa by the Foundation's President, Wilfrid Eggleston. Montreal poet, Irving Layton, receives an award for $4,000, while grants of $2,700 each go to Toronto playwright Norman Williams, Winnipeg novelist Adele Wiseman and Quebec poet, Anne Hébert. These are the first awards in the three-year fellowship scheme announced by the Canada Foundation last July. The aim of the scheme is to provide encouragement to young creative writers in Canada who have already shown promise of important literary achievement. The awards are made upon the recommendation of a national committee set up by the Foundation.

Irving Layton is a high school teacher and one of Canada's best known younger writers. His poems have appeared in book form and in many anthologies and literary journals. Recently he has gained attention as a short-story writer. He is married and has two children.

Miss Anne Hébert, of Quebec City, is one of French Canada's important young literary figures. She has published three books of poetry and at present is engaged in writing a novel and a play. In 1954 she won a Canadian Government Overseas Award and was granted a Quebec Government Scholarship last year. Miss Hébert is at present studying in Paris, on leave of absence from her job as a scenario writer for the National Film Board of Canada.

Norman Williams' one-act plays have won many honors and during the past five years he has been a consistent winner in the highly competitive Ottawa Little Theatre Workshop national play competitions. Two volumes of his short plays have been published and his work is being widely played by amateur theatre groups in Canada and the United States. His full-length play, "To Ride a Tiger", had its premiere performance in Toronto recently.

Miss Adele Wiseman's first novel, "The Sacrifice", with a setting of Jewish family life in Winnipeg, was published in Canada, England and the United States in 1956, and was favorably reviewed by critics in the three countries. She has published numerous book reviews, short stories and literary articles, and is now working on a fictional cycle which will include a novel, a play, and several short stories.

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The Fiddlehead Poetry Books

To provide an outlet for the work of young Canadian poets, the University of New Brunswick and the Bliss Carman Poetry Society of Fredericton, N.B., began a joint project of publishing chapbooks by Canadian writers who, in the opinion of the editorial board of *The Fiddlehead,* deserve encouragement.

500 copies of each book are printed. The books sell at $.50 each and are of uniform length (16 pages) and format.

The following Fiddlehead Poetry Books have been published:

THE STUNTED STRONG
by Fred Cogswell (out of print)

LOST DIVER
by G. W. Downes

EMU, REMEMBER!
by Alfred W. Purdy

* * *

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